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Cal Poly Selects Academy of American Poet Winners

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Award-winning teacher, novelist and poet Todd James Pierce selected Cal Poly English senior Kevin Cabaniss as winner of the Cal Poly Academy of American Poets Award. Cabaniss, from Murietta, will be awarded \$100 for a group of poems.

Pierce also chose English graduate student Marnie Parker of San Luis Obispo and political science senior Brienne Tuttle, from Pleasanton, for honorable mention. Though the award only allows two honorable mentions, Pierce also named English senior Dyna "Raven" McDaniel of San Luis Obispo for a special citation.

According to Pierce, Cabaniss's poems "express loss, anger, grief and love with such a precise voice I felt at times that the narrator of these poems was whispering these confessions directly to me. I was taken not only with individual poems but with the overall effect of the grouping as a type of poetic cycle."

Cal Poly poetry writing Professor Kevin Clark said that "Kevin Cabaniss's poetry shows the kind of extraordinary promise that suggests a high likelihood of later national accolades. The narrative threads take dramatically unexpected turns, and the lyric moments offer unpredictably true insights. Kevin's language is typically colloquial, but on close inspection the reader realizes that subtle alliteration and interior rhyme have worked their effect."

Pierce said that Parker's poem, "Phone Order," "presents a voice so breezy and natural I found myself re-reading many lines, wondering at the way this voice was able to conflate humor and cultural commentary with the tone of spicy gossip that hints at intimacy."

Parker has previously been cited in both the Academy of American Poets contest and the university's Al Landwehr Creative Writing Contest. "Marnie is exceptionally smart, intuitive, poetical and musical," Clark said. "Her poems are often lyric and comic and elegiac, sometimes all at once."

Of Tuttle's "Waking Up In August," Pierce said that he was "drawn to her poem, which presents a series of such sensual, uniquely observed images that it's hard not to fall into the warmth and lovely confusion of the experience presented in the poem."

Pierce felt that McDaniel's poems "attempt to bridge the gap between emotion and intellect, fact and perception. In her best poems, particularly 'Star Dreams' and 'Art and the Impossible,' they do just that: they marry the language and observations of science to the form and glimmering explorations of poetry."

Pierce called this year's entries superb. "I found many excellent poems -- far more than can be acknowledged with the few awards available to me. I read the poems on the page and also read many of them aloud, and through this experience, I was drawn not only to the beauty of the collected work, but to the richness of language and of observation."

A native of the Central Coast, Pierce is a professor of English at Clemson University. He will join Cal Poly's English faculty next year. Pierce is also the author of two novels: "The Australia Stories" and the forthcoming "The Sky Like Tamara Blue."

"It's quite a coup to have him as the judge of our contest," Clark said.

The Academy of American Poets is an organization that promotes poetry all around the country and sponsors individual university contests. The annual poetry contest is judged blind by an off-campus poet.

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